

## Scholarship WINNERS

The International Institute for Trauma & Addiction Professionals proudly awards the **2023-2024 RACS Scholarship to J. Chad Curtis.**



Chad faced significant challenges growing up as a member of the LGBTQ+ community in the conservative South, including bullying, addiction, and family struggles. He attempted to link his addiction to his sexual orientation; and despite seeking therapy, he faced numerous legal issues, battled stage III testicular cancer, and experienced strained relationships, particularly with his father. Achieving sobriety in 2013 marked a turning point for Chad, leading to a commitment to community service and higher education.

The journey included earning certifications as a peer recovery specialist, founding Nashville's first LGBTQ+ Narcotics Anonymous meeting, and excelling academically with various awards. Chad became a prominent speaker at LGBTQ+ and NA conferences nationwide. His passion for LGBTQ+ recovery housing started in 2015, and despite financial challenges, they secured a personal loan to open a ten-bed sober living home in 2022. A substantial grant from the Tennessee Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services aims to establish a second 15-bed location, but obtaining a bridge loan is proving difficult. Despite minimal personal compensation, Chad envisions future growth for their organization, with a focus on staff training and securing funds for continued expansion.



Chad shares exciting developments, including an invitation to join the LGBT+ Leadership Council by Mayor Freddie O'Connell and Senator Heidi Campbell expressing interest in their oversight of LGBT+ inclusion at a state-funded hospital. A partnership with Thistle Farms has been established to allow trans-women to go through their program while living at WAOR. Long-term goals include creating an LGBTQ2iA+ safe sober space, crisis hotline, in-patient substance abuse rehab, counseling services, an LGBTQ+ apartment complex, and a job placement program.

Despite achievements, the LGBTQ+ community in his state continues to face challenges. Chad, who has personally overcome various struggles, seeks to enhance his ability to serve clients through IITAP'S Rainbow Advocate and Clinical Specialist (RACS) training. Affirming treatment is emphasized as an essential element of his career path, rooted in personal experiences and a commitment to bridging gaps in LGBTQ+ support.

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***As a vital asset to the mental health community, here is what some of his colleagues have to say:***

“As a ceaseless and devoted champion of LGBTQIA2+ rights, Chad embodies the values, principles, and goals of the Rainbow Advocate & Educator program. Chad is a highly empathetic human who treats all people with respect and dignity, regardless of their background, life experiences, or identity. Chad’s unwavering support for LGBTQIA2+ individuals, combined with their passion for creating a more inclusive world, make them a perfect fit for the Rainbow Advocate Clinician Training Scholarship. I am confident that Chad possesses the attributes and diligent commitment necessary to significantly elevate your mission of promoting



well-being, acceptance, and equal opportunities for the LGBTQIA2+ community. I'm excited to see Chad prosper in their future role as a Rainbow Advocate Clinician Scholar."

***April Lawson***  
***WAOR Board Member***

"Chad is a leader's leader. He is modeling love, connection, excitement, compassion, and showing Nashville's politicians, treatment industry executives, and recovery community what it means to walk the walk. Chad brings love, light, grace, truth, and humor into all relationships. What's unique about Chad is that not only is he a skilled professional advocating for LGTBQ+ people with substance use disorders and mental health challenges, he is also divinely gifted to meet lost and hopeless spirits and bring them back into the light through community. Chad builds relationships with everyone from the homeless coming into We Are One Recovery center to the local community members who make the six figure salaries. In the same day he breaks bread with a CEO, he might also walk into a room of people who have been attacked, discarded, betrayed, and abandoned by their communities and say, "me too, friend. You never have to be alone again. Let me show you the way out.""

***Jessica Hirsch***  
***M.Ed., LADAC II, QCS, CADC***

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